



Agenda Item Number: 2005-6-7A

BERNALILLO COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Meeting Date: June 14, 2005

Department: Commission **Staff Contact:** John Dantis, Deputy County Manager, Public Safety
Bett Clark, Chief of Fire & Rescue
Kent Hendrickson, Fire Marshal

TITLE: Proclamation Resolution banning the use of open fires, smoking, and fireworks.

ACTION: Conduct a public hearing to determine if drought conditions exist within the specified Fire Districts of the unincorporated areas of Bernalillo County.

Motion to:

1. Declare that a drought condition continue to exist that will increase to severe or extreme drought status.
2. Approve a Proclamation Resolution **PR 1-2005** banning the use of open fires, smoking, and all fireworks in the East Mountain areas and along the Bosque areas of the County as outlined in numbers 1, 2 and 3 of the summary.

SUMMARY:

The County continues to retain authority banning the use of open fires and smoking in the unincorporated area. The proposed proclamation will ban the use of open fires, smoking, and fireworks in the following areas of the County:

1. Fire District #5: All of the wildlands in the unincorporated areas east of Louisiana Boulevard to the west face of the Sandia Mountains, and from San Antonio north to the Sandia Indian Reservation.
2. Fire Districts #6, 10, 11 and 13: East Mountain Area, north, south, and east to the County line.
3. Fire Districts #1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8 and 9: Portions of the unincorporated areas to include the Rio Grande bosque and wildland areas extending 1000 feet from the outer edge of the bosque.

The fire danger across some areas of the Southwest Area is expected to be above average during an overall normal length fire season. This is due to continuing long-term drought, a better than even chance for above normal temperatures, winter snow pack at the mid-elevations that have resulted in more vegetation that has continued to dry throughout the past month of high temperatures and winds, and widespread vegetative dieback due to insect and disease damage. The following highlights are based on a consensus "most likely" scenario. The complete seasonal outlook follows this summary below.

Key factors for the 2005 season are:

- Snow pack in the late winter and early spring produced more than normal ground-level vegetation. The dry weather patterns, high temperatures and high winds over the past month have created a perfect ground fire fuel base as this vegetation is now dry and ready to fuel fast moving ground fires.
- Expect a rapid escalation to critical fire danger conditions from mid May through mid June. Conditions are expected to remain critical through the remainder of June and July, primarily across parts of Arizona and the western third of New Mexico.
- Due to underlying drought conditions, fire danger will increase quickly during normal warm and dry periods of even one week or less. The potential for rapidly changing conditions should be emphasized to field personnel as a fire safety and awareness issue.
- Annual and perennial fuels will undergo an early spring green-up and become available to carry surface fire as they cure. Fine fuels loadings may be higher than in 2002 and 2003, and above normal annual production levels over large areas.
- It is estimated that approximately 19 to 24 percent of total large fires during the 2005 season will have an incident management team assigned, as compared to the average of around 18 percent. This translates to roughly 15 to 20 incidents with an incident management team assigned.
- Resource needs for initial attack, extended attack and potential project fires will be greater than usual from mid May to the start of the monsoon. (6-8 weeks)
- Climate outlooks call for a possible transition to a moderate El Niño by winter 2004/2005, though this is not expected to impact the 2005 fire season.
- There are no indications that the monsoon will begin early or late, or be especially weak or strong.

This ban is necessary to reduce the risk of wildland fires, which pose a threat to timber, vegetation, and property. Fighting the fires exhausts the resources of the County Fire and Rescue Department. The National Weather Service indices and the New Mexico State Forestry Division report that due to the lack of precipitation, high winds, and low humidity, wildland areas throughout the entire state are at a hazardous risk level for burning. Neighboring communities have already placed fire restrictions including Sandia and Manzano Ranger Districts, Sandoval County and City of Albuquerque. The County may issue succeeding proclamations if extreme or severe drought conditions warrant. A proclamation may be modified or rescinded within its thirty-day period by the County upon conducting an emergency hearing to determine if weather conditions have improved.

ATTACHMENT:

1. Proclamation Resolution **PR 1-2005**

FISCAL IMPACT

None.

STAFF ANALYSIS SUMMARY

COUNTY MANAGER

I recommend the Board approve the Proclamation Resolution banning the use of open fires, campfires, smoking and all fireworks in the areas presented in this agenda item. Fire dangers are still very high and the County Fire Department is concerned that unless this ban is implemented, potentially dangerous conditions exist. TL 6/10/05

DEPUTY COUNTY MANAGER FOR PUBLIC SAFETY

The Fire and Rescue Department is requesting the Board of County Commissioners to use the authority given by State Law to decrease the potential for catastrophic wildfire by restricting the use of open burning and fireworks. The East Mountains and Bosque Area of the unincorporated area provide a rich rural setting that is threatened by the possibility of wildfires. The ability to control any potential ignition sources for wild fire is crucial to these communities and surrounding neighborhoods. This proclamation will allow the Commission to accomplish this goal. I recommend approval of this item. J. Baca 6/09/04

LEGAL

NMSA 60-2, C-6.1 provides for the ban of fireworks in severe or extreme drought. Proclamation Resolution approved as to form. TDC 6/10/05

ELECTED OFFICIAL/OTHER

Fire and Rescue Department

The present condition of the Wildland fuels and the weather we have been experiencing has made for a very high fire danger in the East Mountains according to United States Forest Service Sandia Ranger District. There have already been major fires in the northern & southern parts of the State. It is important for the Fire and Rescue Department to control any potential ignition sources for wild fire. This proclamation will help us accomplish our goal. The potential for a more severe than usual primary fire season is above normal and currently on par with the 2002 season. The fine fuel component (grass and brush), is more significant in some areas than in past drought years due to rainfall received during the late winter and spring of 2005. Additionally, the total area of deforestation by drought and insect impacts has continued to increase, further adding to the dead fuel loading. I recommend approval of this item. Bett Clark, Chief of Fire and Rescue 6/09/05